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COMPUTER SHOPPER™

Computer Shopper is published monthly for \$15 per year by Patch Publishing Co., Inc., 407 S. Washington Ave., Titusville, FL 32796. Application to mail at Second-Class Postage Rates is pending at Titusville, FL and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to COMPUTER SHOPPER, P.O. Box F, Titusville, FL 32781.

Patch Publishing Co., Inc.

407 S. Washington Ave., P.O. Box F • Titusville, FL 32781
(305) 269-3211

Source ID No.: TCS575 • Compuserve No. 70275,1023

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ATARI

Atari, The House That Jack Bought

By Stan Veit

On July 2, 1984, Warner Communications Inc. announced that their Atari Computer subsidiary had been sold to a company headed by Jack Tramiel, formerly CED of Commodore.

While it had been general knowledge that the home computer and home video game segments of the business were on the block after Warner's losses were reported to be \$425 million for the second quarter of 1984, the sale came as a surprise to the industry.

Jack Tramiel is known for surprises. His management of Commodore and the introduction of the Pet, VIC-20 and Commodore 64 Computers all defied conventional industry "wisdom" and all were a huge success. In fact, it might be said that Commodore under the leadership of Jack Tramiel is the only company that has made a success out of home computers. In addition, his opening of the educational

market with the "buy 2, get one free" sales was a master stroke of marketing. He was also a leader in the educational software field, providing free programs to schools.

Jack has been known as a hard man to work for and there were many jokes about "The President of The Month Club" at Commodore. However none can deny his ability or drive. It came as a shock when he resigned from the leadership of Commodore, this was one surprise that nobody expected. He merely said the company had grown beyond the point where his type of leadership was needed by the organization and that it was better if he left.

Now he is confronted by a company that has been badly abused by a non-understanding management and that has managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It will take all of the efforts of even Jack Tramiel to turn this one around. When

asked about the prospects, Jack said, "both the computer and video game marketplace continue, in my view, to offer great opportunities. The enormous potential of applying technological developments in the fields of communication, entertainment and education is the challenge for us all over the years ahead. At Atari, I believe there is the capability and the foundation which will enable us to fulfill this transaction, and eager to proceed with the work ahead."

The financial arrangements for the sale include an infusion of \$75 million by Jack Tramiel and his associates. Warner Communications received \$240 million in debts of the new company. This means that the company was sold for a future payoff, (if possible). A good deal for both parties since the computer business represented a drag on Warner.

In an attempt to get some

additional information for our readers, we contacted Atari, but their spokesman would only say, "We have nothing to say to the press at this time". This is the same kind of thing that Atari has been noted for in the past, failure to communicate with its users and the industry

press. It represents a kind of isolation from the market that in some measure contributed to its failure to capitalize on what was essentially a good product line. This is not Jack Tramiel's style and you may be sure that things will be different in the near future.

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by Hardin Brothers

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The Los Angeles Byte Computer Show (June 14 to 17) was one of their recent stops. After a disappointing Byte Show earlier in Chicago, this show had to prove that the concept was valid. They came close to succeeding.

On Thursday, the first day of the show, things looked bleak. I heard exhibitors complaining about the lack of visitors, and visitors complain-

ing about the lack of exhibitors. By the weekend, however, everyone seemed to be in a much better mood, and the show seemed to be at least a moderate success.

When I heard that the show was to take place in the Los Angeles Convention Center, a mammoth building, I assumed that it would be a large affair with several hundred exhibitors. I arrived on Thursday

morning to find that a nephrology conference was being held in the Convention Center, and that the Byte show was relegated to a much smaller building to the east called North Hall (you figure it out!). Once I was inside, I was further dismayed to see that the computer show only used about two thirds of the space available in North Hall. I think the same disappointment hit

most people that morning as they walked in.

There were just under 100 exhibitor booths allocated for the show. A five minute walk around the exhibit floor revealed that not all the booths had been rented. Though there were banners overhead numbering the aisles from 100 to 600, they were totally unnecessary; it was impossible to get lost among the displays.

None of the big computer manufacturers were present at the show. IBM, Apple, Tandy, Commodore, Atari, TI, etc., were all conspicuous by their absence. Kaypro did have an exhibit, however, as well as Tava (an IBM clone), Seequa (another clone), Blue Fox, (yet another clone), and Fujitsu (an upward-expandable clone).

In some ways, the most interesting of the clone exhibitors was Blue Fox. It's likely that you've never heard of the name; the computer had been on the market for three weeks prior to this show -- more precisely, from what I could determine, it had been displayed at another show three weeks earlier. The Blue Fox was offered in two ver-

Continued on page 107

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Atari Software Reviews

By Jeff Brenner

This month you'll notice the addition of the traditional four star rating system in my

reviews. This is designed to give you a more accurate account of each program's qualities. The ratings are as follows:

★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★ GOOD
★★ FAIR
★ POOR

The program is rated on

each of the following criteria:
(1) **PROGRAM DESIGN** - This refers to the overall quality of the program. How are the graphics? The sound effects? Is

is easy to use? etc.
(2) **AMUSEMENT LEVEL** (for game programs) or **PRACTICALITY** (for non-game programs) - How entertaining is the game? How useful is the program?
(3) **DOCUMENTATION** - Are the instructions ample for the particular program? Are they easy to understand?
(4) **VALUE** - A game program might be appealing, but if it sells for a hundred dollars, you might not want it. This gives an indication of how much you get for your money.

The overall rating is based on the average of all of these ratings and appears with the name of the program. If you think I should include other criteria or have any other comments/ suggestions, send me a note c/o Computer Shopper. Manufacturers: If your programs will stand up to my criteria, send them in to me. We want to see more exciting, entertaining, top-notch programs.

Now, on to the reviews!

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for the Atari 800, 800XL and 1200XL.

Also available for the Commodore 64, Apple, IBM PCjr. Author: Y. Lempereur. Idea by A. Marsily

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Continued on page 110

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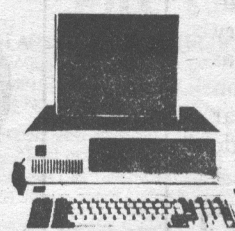
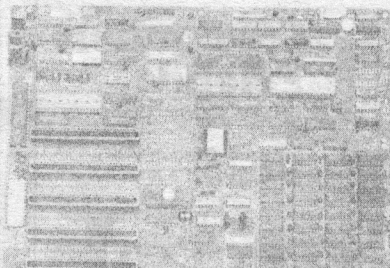
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Atari Reviews

Continued from page 108
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The year is none other than 2096 and the world is in serious trouble. Computer Control, a huge computer, has suddenly decided to remove all freedoms

from the face of the earth. It is located far from civilization and is extremely well protected by intelligent flak batteries. These flak batteries relentlessly seek out offensive crafts and destroy them.

You are provided with a state of the art aircraft and an

air-to-ground cannon. Your assignment: Save the earth by blowing up the oversized CPU.

Welcome to Flak, FunSoft's newest action game. But not so fast...Although Flak is on diskette, it takes almost a minute and a half to load. Its loading brings back memories of those cassette days of waiting patiently for minutes with annoying beeps and I/O errors until the program would load. The long loading time is due to extensive copy protection which FunSoft calls "Synchrolock." It's just another hardship we must endure because of the activities of software pirates. Let's hope the long loading period will not

become characteristic of all new releases for the Atari, or else we might as well sell our drives and bring out the program recorder.

Once the game is loaded, though, things move swiftly. You can choose the NORMAL or BEGINNER play level, and one or two players. On the beginner level, the flak batteries fire less frequently than the NORMAL level. I noted one problem with the two player game. The program reads only the first joystick port. Thus, even if you have two joysticks, you and your opponent must take turns using the first joystick - an inconvenience.

You are given four aircrafts when the game begins. An extra craft is given for every 10,000 points scored. The craft takes off from the airstrip, and then takes you over the trees and roads down below. But amidst the beautiful scenery are the flak batteries. You must shoot the batteries to score points, while avoiding their fire. The high resolution scrolling graphics are excellent and impressive. Holding down the joystick trigger will result in continuous fire. I like that.

The screen slowly becomes more ominous and dangerous as you approach Computer Control. The flak batteries become more numerous, and in one section, they are even invisible until they fire at you.

When you are hit by the flak, you lose a ship and you take off from the airstrip again. However, you do not have to start all over from the beginning, as many games make you do. Instead, the aircraft rapidly zooms through all of the scenery until it reaches the point where you were hit. That's exciting and builds up tension.

If you survive long enough to reach the CPU, you'll notice that the surroundings become somewhat ridiculous. One moment you are above realistic terrain and the next you are flying over gigantic computer ships. And what does Computer Control turn out to be?

Continued on page 112

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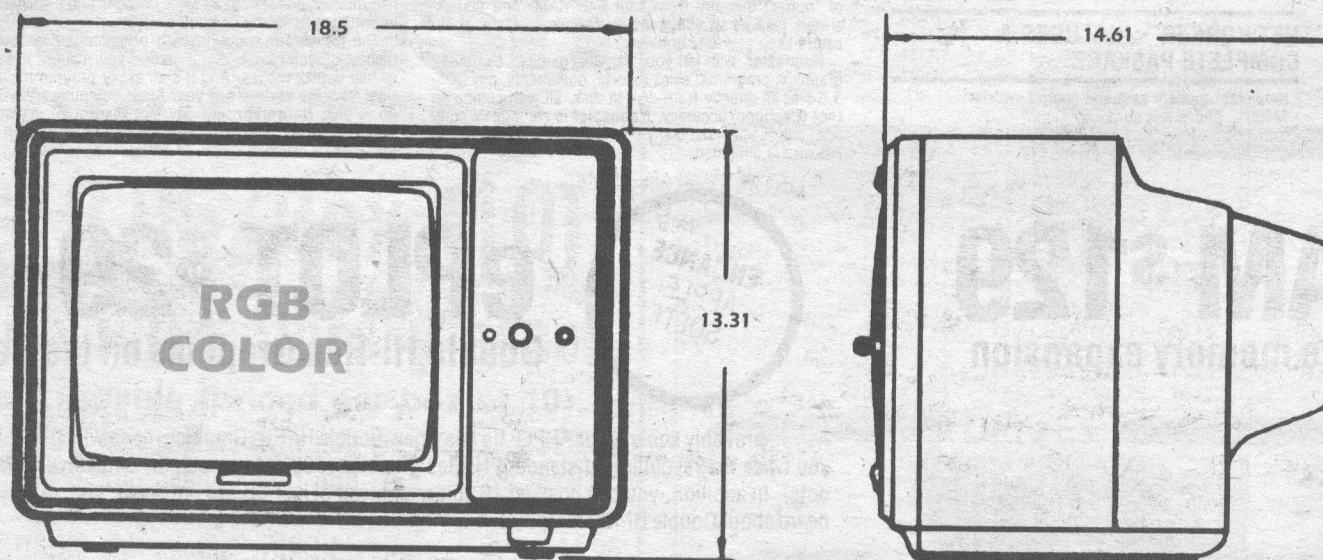
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Atari Reviews Continued from page 110

A colossal 6502 chip! Destroying Computer Control earns you bonus points and a chance to do it all over again. The high scores are saved to disk.

The documentation for this game is flimsy. It consists of loading instructions and maybe 150 words on playing the game. You'll learn more on how to play from this review. However, as FunSoft probably assumed, most of you will be able to figure out how to play soon after the game begins.

While Flak might not be "the ultimate flight experience" as its packaging claims, and its price is somewhat high, it is appealing and addicting. The graphics are as good as they can be, and the music and sound effects are well done. I think you'll like it.

RATINGS FOR FLAK:

Program Design ★★★★★
 Amusement Level ★★★★★

Continued on page 114

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Atari Reviews
Continued from page 112

Documentation ★★
Value ★★
AVERAGE ★★★

★★★★ Star League Baseball
for the 800, 800XL and
1200XL
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modore 64.
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Dan Ugrin, Scott Orr, Bruce
Mitchell
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Cassidy, with his curve ball
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between "LINERS" or
"SLUGGERS" for your bat-
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select batting practice,

Continued on page 116

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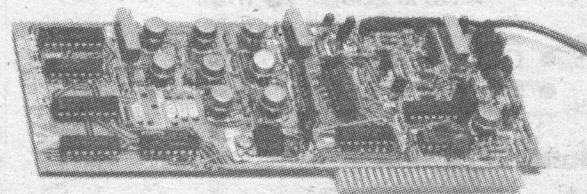


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Atari Reviews

Continued from page 114

"HEAT" Muldoon pitches to you.

After you've listened to the

National Anthem, you're out at the stadium. The graphics are fantastically realistic - you not only see the field and the players, but you see the

dugouts and the spectators in the stadium. But the realism doesn't end there: the batters can bunt, runners can steal bases, and the pitcher throws more slowly as he becomes tired.

The shadow of the ball is visible whenever the ball is in the air. The shadow is extremely important in the game as it helps you determine whether a pitch is too high or low, and whether a hit is a grounder or a fly. Also, a fly ball is caught by positioning the fielder on the shadow of the falling ball.

Batting is done by pressing the trigger. An early swing will hit the ball to the left field, while a late swing will hit it to right field. Homeruns are apparently random, and occur about three times per game.

You'll have to develop good timing and become familiar with the various pitches before you can become a proficient batter. If you hit a fair ball, you will be automatically advanced to first base. However, once on first base, you can move to lead or to steal. You can also move back to first base. When more than one runner is on base, you control the leading one, while the others are moved automatically, if forced.

When the ball has been hit, the fielder closest to it becomes active and can be moved to catch the ball or to throw it to a base. Double, and even triple plays are possible as any baseman can throw the ball to another. The baseman holding the ball turns to a solid black color and can be moved to any points on the field.

The full nine innings are played, and the game goes into extra innings if necessary. As the game progresses, the pitchers become tired and their pitches slow down or miss the strike zone. However, you can choose a relief pitcher after the seventh inning. All of this adds to the realism of the game. The scoreboard is displayed after every half inning.

The animation of the players is well done, and the sound effects add to the excitement. The music at the beginning and between half-innings should also be commended. The documentation is com-

plete and easy to understand.

I do have two minor criticisms of Star League Baseball. As realistic as the game is, there are a few occurrences which are rarely seen in American baseball. For example, a batter can hit a ball into the outfield and be thrown out at first. Another criticism concerns the advertisements which Gamestar displays between innings for their products. After the first few times, this becomes annoying. Yet, these

complaints are insignificant when compared to the quality of this game.

Just about every aspect of real baseball has been captured in this program. I highly recommend this "hit." Great work, Gamestar.

RATINGS FOR STAR LEAGUE BASEBALL

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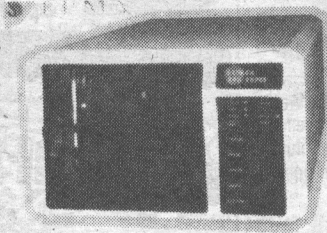
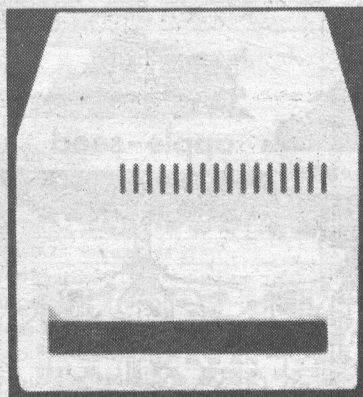
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GRA Graphics
HOM Home Economics
PER Personal + Recreation

PROGRAMMING
• CODE
ASM Assembler
BAS BASIC Language
COB Cobol Language
CST Cassette Program
DBM Data Base Manager
EDT Editor
FOR FORTRAN Language
FTH Forth Language
LNG Other Languages
O/S Operating System
PAS Pascal Language
RPT Report Writer

SOU Sound Prog./Device
TEL Telecommunications
UTL UTILITY/OTHER
CAT EXTENSIVE CATALOG
OTH OTHER PROGRAMS AND SOFTWARE

CUS CUSTOMIZED S/WARE

BUSINESS
• CODE
ANA Business Analysis
A/P Accounts Payable
A/R Accounts Receivable
BUS General Bus./Other
CAS Cash Register
G/L General Ledger
INV Inventory
JOB Job Costing
MAI Mailing List
OMG Osborne/McGraw-Hill Business Pkg.

PKG Complete Package
PAY Payroll
TAX Tax Packages
W/P Word Processing

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FIN Financial
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MED Medical
PTR Prof. Time Reporter
REA Real Estate
SAL Sales Analysis
STA Statistics
SXC Stock Exchange

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